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## ***FOREWORD***

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The Medical Examiner's Office serves the community by investigating sudden, violent, unexpected, and suspicious deaths. The Medical Examiner's staff recognizes the tragedy surrounding an untimely death and performs its investigations, in part, to assist the grieving family. A complete investigation provides for the expeditious settling of insurance claims and estates, as well as for implementing civil and criminal actions. Questions which seem irrelevant in the initial hours after death can become significant in the following months. The surviving family, friends, and general public should have the assurance that a complete investigation was conducted.

When a death occurs on the job or is work related, the results of our investigation are immediately forwarded to the State Department of Labor and Industry so that the family can gain full benefit of our findings. Private insurance companies also routinely use these findings to settle claims. Whenever a consumer product is implicated in a death, we notify the Consumer Product Safety Commission to ensure that the product is studied and the necessary steps are taken to protect the public. The public health dimension of the Medical Examiner's function is designed to isolate and identify causes of sudden, unexpected death. When an infectious agent or poison is implicated in a death, the family and contacts of the deceased are notified in order that they might receive any needed medical treatment. In this era of fear regarding bioterrorism, the Medical Examiner provides an important level of surveillance for such possibilities.

The medical investigation of violent death is frequently required in civil or criminal judicial proceedings. Thus, a prompt medical investigation is conducted to provide the criminal justice system with medical information and evidence required for adjudication. Although criminal death investigations constitute a small portion of deaths investigated by the Medical Examiner, these deaths are studied in great detail because of the issues and legal consequences involved. In this way, the criminal justice system is offered the best support that medical science can provide.



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*DESCRIPTION AND PURPOSE  
of the  
Public Health – Seattle & King County  
King County Medical Examiner's Office*

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With the adoption of the Home Rule Charter in 1969, the King County Office of Coroner was abolished and replaced by the King County Medical Examiner's Office. The Medical Examiner's Office is part of the Prevention Division of the Seattle-King County Department of Public Health. Although the Department is a combined City-County department, this Office is funded by the County and is under the King County Executive.

The Chief Medical Examiner is a physician trained and certified in Forensic Pathology, the branch of medicine concerned with the scientific investigation of sudden and unexpected, violent or suspicious deaths. Three Sections are under the Chief Medical Examiner's direction: Scene Investigation, Autopsy Support and Administrative Support. These duties include field investigation of scene and circumstances of death, identification of the deceased, performance of autopsies when indicated, certification of death, notification of next-of-kin, and control and disposition of personal property of the deceased.

Deaths which come under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner are defined by state statute (RCW 68.50) and include but are not limited to the following circumstances:

1. Persons who die suddenly when in apparent good health and without medical attendance within thirty-six hours preceding death.
2. Circumstances which indicate death was caused in part or entirely by unnatural or unlawful means.
3. Suspicious circumstances.
4. Unknown or obscure causes.
5. Deaths caused by any violence whatsoever, when the injury was the primary cause or a contributory factor in the death.
6. Contagious disease.
7. Unclaimed bodies.

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***MISSION STATEMENT***  
*of the*  
*Public Health – Seattle & King County*  
*King County Medical Examiner's Office*

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**The mission of the King County Medical Examiner's Office (KCMEO) is to investigate sudden, unexpected and unnatural deaths in King County with the highest level of professionalism, compassion and efficiency and to provide a resource for improving the health and safety of the community consistent with the general mission of Public Health.**

To achieve this mission, KCMEO will:

Coordinate investigative efforts with law enforcement, hospitals, and other agencies in a professional and courteous manner.

Treat decedents and their effects with dignity and respect, without discrimination.

Conduct investigations and autopsies professionally, scientifically, and conscientiously and complete reports expeditiously with regard for the concerns of family members, criminal justice, and public health and public safety.

Provide compassion, courtesy, and honest information to family members and, with sensitivity for cultural differences, make appropriate efforts in assisting with their grief, medical and legal questions, disposition of decedents and effects, and other settlements.

Collect, compile, and disseminate information regarding deaths in a manner consistent with the laws of Washington state and consistent with the mission of Public Health.

Provide medical and scientific testimony in court and in deposition as well as medicolegal consultation for prosecuting attorneys, defense attorneys, and attorneys representing surviving family members.

Promote and advance through education and research the sciences and practices of death investigation, pathology, and anthropology within KCMEO and in collaboration with educational institutions.

Promote and maintain an emotionally and physically healthy and safe working environment for KCMEO employees, following Public Health policies for standards of conduct, management, and support for employee diversity, training, and development.

Expand communication throughout Public Health and the community at large regarding the roles, responsibilities, and objectives of KCMEO.